

**Town of Amherst Ways and Means Committee Report
for the Amherst Town Deliberative Session on February 4, 2004**

The Amherst Town Ways and Means Committee would like to express its thanks for the support the Selectmen, The Town Administrator, Selectmen's Assistant, and all of the Town Department Heads have given the Ways and Means Committee during this budget cycle.

The Ways and Means Committee is in favor of the approach the Selectmen have taken to develop the operating budget and other warrant articles. This approach involves the Town Ways and Means Committee in all aspects of budget development and review. The committee was heavily involved from the time the budget target was established in September 2003 through the period when budget and warrants were voted on by the Selectmen in January 2004. The committee had ample access to the Selectmen, Town Administrator and Town Department Heads throughout this process.

After careful consideration of the Town operating budget and the other warrant articles, the Town Ways and Means Committee is prepared to make the following recommendations:

Article 2 – To see if the Town will raise and appropriate, the sum of five million five hundred thousand dollars (\$5,500,000) for the purchase of open space lands or other property interests therein to meet conservation and passive recreation needs, to include up to 15 percent or (\$825,000) for the purchase of open space lands to meet active recreation needs if suitable parcels become available. [To be bonded]

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Town Ways and Means Committee feels that in addition to the direct benefits of conservation and passive recreation land, purchasing this land insures that it will not be developed thus not putting additional pressure on the Town's infrastructure, including the schools.

The Amherst Conservation Commission has done a lot of preparation in regard to this warrant article and gave a very persuasive presentation on the long range benefits to the town taxpayers.

Article 3 - To see if the Town will raise and appropriate, the sum of two hundred forty nine thousand five hundred dollars (\$249,500) for the purpose of establishing a turning lane and traffic light on Boston Post Road and Davis Witty Drive. [To be bonded]

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article with a vote of 4 in favor and 3 opposed.

The Town Ways and Means Committee is split on their views of this warrant article.

Those in favor believe that there is a safety issue at this intersection and that sooner or later this will have to be addressed. By bringing this project "in-house" the estimated cost to the town for this work has been reduced from an estimate of \$378,000 to \$249,500.

Those opposed do not feel that there has been adequate research into the alternatives. In addition, previously one of the primary benefits for these improvements was the reconfiguration of the bus and individual car drop-off and pick-up areas for the Amherst Middle School. There is no warrant being presented to the voters this year to address the issues at the Amherst Middle School.

Article 4 - To see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum of two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) for the purpose of purchasing a replacement Truck for the Fire Department. [To be bonded]

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Town Ways and Means Committee supports the move from Capital Reserve funding to bonding for this particular item.

Due to the currently attractive low interest rates it makes financial sense to bond this particular type of large equipment purchase. In addition, the cost will be spread out over 10 years and will be borne by the citizens and taxpayers who benefit from it.

[Note: The Selectmen have committed unanimously to return the \$83,000 capital reserve amount in the current budget to be used to reduce taxes pending the passage of this warrant article.]

Article 5 - To see if the Town will raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth herein, totaling \$7,249,780.95. The default budget is \$6,985,709.41

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor 0 opposed.

The Amherst Town Ways and Means Committee has been very involved in the budget process since the very beginning back in September 2003. We have met with the Selectmen, Town Administrator and all of the Department Heads several times and have gone over each line item in the budget multiple times. After many iterations, the Selectmen were able to achieve their stated target and the committee supports this budget.

There has been a lot of discussion and cooperation between the town departments to look at how the town can more efficiently provide the same level of town services at a lower cost. This has allowed the Selectmen to keep the budget within their stated target for FY2005.

Article 6 - To see if the Town will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Selectmen and the Teamster's Union (*Department of Public Works Union*) and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$50,953.00 for the current fiscal year.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Selectmen and the Teamster's Union have worked to come up with an agreement that is both fair to the Town and to the unionized Department of Public Works employees. Approving this ratifies the work previously done and shows support for these employees.

Article 7 - To see if the Town will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Selectmen and the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Union (*Police Union*) and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$60,363.00 for the current fiscal year.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Selectmen and the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Union have worked to come up with an agreement that is both fair to the Town and to the unionized Police employees. Approving this ratifies the work previously done and shows support for these employees.

Article 8 - To see if the Town will vote to establish a Revaluation Capital Reserve Fund under the provisions of RSA 35:1 for the purpose of revaluation and to raise and appropriate \$25,000.

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Town Ways and Means Committee supports the recommendation of the Selectmen that a sum of \$25,000 per year be set aside in a Revaluation Capital Reserve Fund so that when another property revaluation is done in 4-5 years (per state mandate) there will be the funds there. In the past we have seen a spike in town taxes in the year in which a revaluation occurs.

Article 9 - To see if the Town will appropriate the sum of one ninety eight thousand dollars (\$198,000) for the purpose of purchasing two replacement two wheeled dump trucks for the Department of Public Works and authorize the withdrawal from the Capital Reserves Highway Vehicle Fund established for this purpose.

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

These two vehicles were previously planned as part of the Capital Reserve Highway Vehicle Fund and this warrant is for the purpose of withdrawing the funds to purchase the trucks as planned.

Article 10 - To see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum of one hundred seventy five thousand dollars (\$175,000) for the continuing reconstruction of the Amherst Town Hall to include reconfiguring the historic front entrance, hallway, and upgrades to the mechanical (heating and A/C) and electrical systems.

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article with a vote of 6 in favor and 1 opposed.

The Town Ways and Means Committee supports the recommendation of the Selectmen to continue the reconstruction of the Amherst Town Hall to include restoring the historic front entrance, reconfiguring the hallway, and upgrades to the mechanical (heating and A/C) and electrical systems.

Article 11 - To see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum of twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) for the Peabody Mill Environmental Center's capital campaign to expand and renovate the building.

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article with a vote of 6 in favor and none opposed with 1 abstention. As a member of the Peabody Mill board, one member abstained.

The Town Ways and Means Committee supports this warrant article for \$20,000 to help in the funding of the Peabody Mill Environmental Center's capital campaign.

The Peabody Mill Environmental Center has become a integral part of the services provided to the citizens of Amherst. This town department has made great strides to expand their facilities and programs and this payment of \$20,000 is in recognition of their need for additional funding to continue and expand.

Article 12 - To see whether the Town will vote to amend the terms of the Recreation Revolving Fund, created by the passage of Article 13 at the Annual Town Meeting in March of 2001, and authorize the Recreation Director, subject to the approval of the Board of Selectmen, to expend said monies for any purpose consistent with the purpose and intent of RSA 35-B.

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article with a vote of 6 in favor and 1 opposed.

The Town Ways and Means Committee supports this change to the Recreation Revolving Account which expands the types of expenditures that can be made out of the existing Recreation Revolving Account.

Article 13 - To see if the Town will vote to expand the Veteran's Exemption from \$100.00 to \$150.00 per year in accordance with RSA 72:28.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 6 in favor and 1 opposed.

Article 14 - To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate up to \$100,000 to be added to the Recreation Capital Reserve Fund, and authorize the use of the (June 30, 2004), fund balance in that amount for this purpose.

The Ways and Means Committee

Article Petition – 1 - The town of Amherst shall purchase said property known as Bon Terrain, designated Map 2/Lot 2 and 26 at its fair market value as soon as possible after the passage of this provision in March, 2004. The fair market value shall be obtained by having Conservation Commission Chairman choose three appraisors, agreed on by the Commission, and then taking the average of those appraisals and paying that amount to the current owner/s. The land will then be held as open conservation land, managed by the Conservation Commission, in perpetuity.

The Ways and Means Committee **does not support** this article with a vote of 0 in favor and 7 opposed.

The Ways and Means Committee opposes this warrant article and does not believe it is in the best interest of the Town of Amherst.

Submitted by:

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